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# FSQS FACTS

## FOOD ACCEPTANCE SERVICE

The Food Safety and Quality Service (FSQS), in cooperation with State agencies, offers official grading or inspection for quality of manufactured dairy products, poultry and eggs, meat, and fresh and processed fruits and vegetables. Grading is based on U.S. grade standards developed by the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for these products.

Included in the broad range of inspection and grading programs is the food acceptance service, which was developed by USDA to make the job of institutional food buying easier.

The acceptance service provides impartial evaluation and certification that food purchases meet contract specifications. Any hospital, hotel, restaurant, governmental agency, educational institution, airline, or other public or private groups buying food in large quantities may benefit from the service. Suppliers often use the acceptance service to assure that they meet contract specifications.

The acceptance procedure varies slightly for different commodities, but operates in essentially the same way for most food products. To obtain certification of food purchases, buyers should state in their contracts with suppliers that purchases must be certified by USDA. Product requirements in the contract are based either on official USDA grade standards, or specifications already available for some commodities, or on specifications tailored to the buyer's specific needs. Specifications include factors such as USDA quality grades, condition, type of refrigeration, cut, trim, size, packaging, weight, shape, and color.

When the purchaser has worked out the specifications, he selects a supplier or calls for bids from several suppliers for the amount of food he needs. The supplier is responsible for obtaining certification of the purchases by USDA. The food acceptance service, like all grading services, is provided for a fee.

To provide acceptance service, an official grader in FSQS or a cooperating State agency examines the product at the manufacturing, processing or packing plant or the supplier's warehouse. If the product meets contract specifications, the grader stamps it with an official stamp or grademark. He also issues certificates which show that the products examined comply with the contract specifications--that is, they are "accepted." If the product does not meet the specifications, it does not qualify for the official stamp or grademark and therefore is not accepted.

This method of procurement assures purchasers they are getting what they order. It also encourages competitive bidding and usually results in overall higher quality food, permits long-range meal planning, and eliminates controversies between the buyer and seller over compliance of the product. Additionally, it makes frequent trips to suppliers unnecessary.

FSQS provides food acceptance service for five food categories:

- Dairy products. The acceptance service for dairy products includes butter, cheese, and dried milks. Purchase specifications for butter include U.S. grade and whether the product is to be shipped in bulk, patties, or prints. For Swiss, Cheddar, Colby, and Monterey cheese, the product may be ordered by type of cure desired, and by U.S. grade. Other natural cheeses, including blue, Muenster, and cottage cheese, may be inspected for condition, flavor, and other desirable characteristics.

Dried milk, including whole or instant nonfat, can be bought by specifications. The principal factors include determination of butterfat, moisture, solubility and various bacterial counts.

Other dairy products such as ice cream, evaporated milk, and malted milk may be checked for any factors specified by the buyer.

- Poultry and eggs. Poultry, eggs, and frozen and dried egg products are included in this acceptance service. Specifications for poultry usually include U.S. grade, kind, type, class, size or weight, packaging, and transportation. For shell eggs, specifications include U.S. grade and weight (size), and the packaging date. Specifications for egg products may include type (such as whole eggs, whites, or yolks), packaging, official USDA inspection, and various laboratory analyses for physical, chemical, and bacteriological factors.

- Meat and meat products. Volume buyers can use the acceptance service to purchase beef, lamb and mutton, veal and calf, pork, cured pork, cured beef, edible by-products, and sausage products.

Detailed specifications are available that cover USDA grade, cut, trim, type of refrigeration, weight, or other options requested.

- Fresh fruits and vegetables. Purchase specifications for produce generally include U.S. grade, which covers such factors as condition, maturity, shape, color, and freedom from defects, including decay. Additional requirements such as variety, size, or stage of ripeness may be specified.

- Processed fruits and vegetables. The acceptance service is available for a wide range of frozen, dried, dehydrated, or canned products. Processed products may be ordered by U.S. grade--covering such factors as color, uniformity of size and shape, freedom from defects, tenderness, texture, and flavor--or other specified requirements.

If you are interested in using the acceptance service for any of these products, contact the nearest grading office of USDA's Food Safety and Quality Service. If you cannot locate a nearby grading representative, write to the appropriate commodity division in Washington, D.C.

For poultry, eggs, egg products, and dairy products, contact the Poultry and Dairy Quality Division; for meat and meat products, the Meat Quality Division; for fresh and processed fruits and vegetables, the Fruit and Vegetable Quality Division. The headquarters address for each division is Food Safety and Quality Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Washington, DC 20250.